

Amendments To The Claims

In the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listing of claims in the application:

Cancel claims 1-28 without prejudice.

Add new claims 29-61.

1. (canceled)
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29. (new) A process for pasteurizing an outer surface of a food product wherein said outer surface extends around said food product and said food product has already been cooked, said process comprising the steps of:

- (a) exposing said outer surface to infrared energy by continuously conveying said food product through an infrared oven and then
- (b) packaging said food product,

wherein step (a) is conducted in a manner such that substantially no change in color is produced in said outer surface and wherein substantially no additional heating of said food product occurs between steps (a) and (b).

30. (new) The process of claim 29 wherein no intervening cooling step is performed between steps (a) and (b).

31. (new) The process of claim 29 wherein said food product has an internal core temperature and wherein step (a) is conducted in a manner such that no substantial increase in said internal core temperature occurs.

32. (new) The process of claim 31 wherein said outer surface is exposed to said infrared energy in step (a) in a manner effective for achieving at least a 3 log reduction in live bacteria on said outer surface.

33. (new) The process of claim 29 wherein said outer surface is exposed to said infrared energy in step (a) in a manner effective for achieving at least a 3 log reduction in live bacteria on said outer surface.

34. (new) The process of claim 29 wherein said infrared oven is operated in step (a) at an oven temperature of at least 700° F.

35. (new) The process of claim 34 wherein said oven temperature is at least 750°F.

36. (new) The process of claim 29 wherein said food product is selected from the group consisting of precooked meat products, precooked poultry products, and precooked fish products.

37. (new) The process of claim 29 wherein said food product is selected from the group consisting of precooked emulsified meat products, precooked whole muscle meat products, precooked emulsified poultry products, and precooked whole muscle poultry products.

38. (new) The process of claim 37 wherein said food product is a slicing log.
39. (new) The process of claim 37 wherein said food product is a whole muscle turkey breast.
40. (new) A process for surface pasteurizing a food product which has already been cooked, said food product having an outer surface which surrounds said food product and said process comprising the step of exposing said food product to infrared energy by continuously conveying said food product through an infrared oven, wherein said food product is substantially surrounded laterally by infrared elements as said food product is conveyed through said infrared oven such that substantially all of said outer surface of said food product is directly irradiated with said infrared energy.
41. (new) The process of claim 40 wherein said infrared oven further comprises a conveyor having a carrying run on which said food product is continuously conveyed through said infrared oven, said food product having a bottom portion residing on said carrying run and said conveyor being effective such that said bottom portion is directly irradiated with said infrared energy as said food product is conveyed on said carrying run.
42. (new) The process of claim 41 wherein said conveyor comprises a stainless steel wire belt.

43. (new) The process of claim 41 wherein said food product has sides extending upwardly from said bottom portion and said infrared elements include elements having at least portions of which are positioned adjacent said sides for directly irradiating said sides as said food product is conveyed on said carrying run.

44. (new) The process of claim 40 wherein said step of exposing is conducted in a manner such that substantially no color change occurs in said outer surface.

45. (new) The process of claim 40 wherein said process further comprises the step, after said step of exposing, of packaging said food product and wherein no additional heating of said food product occurs between said step of exposing and said step of packaging.

46. (new) The process of claim 40 wherein said food product is exposed to said infrared energy in a manner effective for achieving at least a 3 log reduction in live surface bacteria.

47. (new) The process of claim 40 wherein said infrared oven is operated in said step of exposing at at least 700°F.

48. (new) The process of claim 40 wherein said process further comprises the step, after said step of exposing, of packaging said food product and wherein no intervening cooling step is performed between said step of exposing and said step of packaging.

49. (new) The process of claim 40 wherein said food product has an internal core temperature and wherein substantially no increase in said internal core temperature occurs in said step of exposing.

50. (new) A process for surface pasteurizing a food product which has already been cooked, said process comprising the step of exposing said food product to infrared energy by continuously conveying said food product through an infrared oven, wherein said infrared oven includes:

a conveyor having a carrying run on which said food product is continuously conveyed through said infrared oven;

a plurality of arched lateral upper infrared elements positioned over said carrying run; and

a plurality of lower infrared elements positioned below said carrying run.

51. (new) The process of claim 50 wherein said arched lateral upper infrared elements have an inverted U-shape.



52. (new) The process of claim 50 wherein said food product has a bottom portion which rests on said carrying run and said conveyor is effective for allowing said lower infrared elements to directly irradiate said bottom portion with said infrared energy through said carrying run.

53. (new) The process of claim 52 wherein said conveyor comprises a stainless steel wire belt.

54. (new) The process of claim 50 wherein said upper and said lower infrared elements substantially surround all of said food product laterally as said food product is conveyed through said infrared oven.

55. (new) The process of claim 50 wherein said process further comprises the step, after said step of exposing, of packaging said food product and wherein no additional heating of said food product occurs between said step of exposing and said step of packaging.

56. (new) The process of claim 55 wherein said infrared oven is operated in said step of exposing at at least 700°F.

57. (new) The process of claim 50 wherein said food product is exposed to said infrared energy in a manner effective for achieving at least a 3 log reduction in live surface bacteria.

58. (new) The process of claim 50 wherein said infrared oven is operated in said step of exposing at at least 700°F and said food product has a residence time in said infrared oven of not more than two minutes.

59. (new) The process of claim 50 wherein said process further comprises the step, after said step of exposing, of packaging said food product and wherein no intervening cooling step is performed between said step of exposing and said step of packaging.

60. (new) The process of claim 50 wherein said food product has an internal core temperature and wherein substantially no increase in said internal core temperature occurs in said step of exposing.

61. (new) The process of claim 50 wherein said step of exposing is conducted in a manner such that substantially no surface color change of said food product occurs.